

Carrizo Plain National Monument Advisory Committee (MAC)
June 25, 2011, meeting notes

Attendees:

MAC – Neil Havlik, Carl Twisselman, Ellen Cypher, Ray Hatch, Jim Patterson, Ray Watson, Michael Khus-Zarate.

BLM: Kathy Hardy, Johna Hurl, Tim Smith, Kathy Sharum, Ryan Cooper, David Christy, John Kelley, Karen Doran.

Public: Cal French, Lodema Hatch, Kathleen Buttke, Larry Buttke, Pat Veasart, Ann Myhre, Dennis Fox.

Opening remarks

Tim Smith, Bakersfield Field Office manager, welcomed attendees and introduced John Kelley, who replaces Judy Sackett as the new outreach and administrative report technician for the Carrizo. Tim Smith said the Bakersfield draft Resource Management Plan should be available for public review in late summer or early fall.

Duane Christian, retired BLM archaeologist, had worked on getting a National Historic Landmark designation for part of the Carrizo. A National Park Service board will review the proposal this fall. If they approve it, it will go to the Interior Secretary for review and possible designation. The designation would cover about 7,000 acres in the cultural district that includes Painted Rock and other sites.

Pat Veasart asked if the designation would include additional funding. Tim Smith said it would not. Kathy Hardy, BLM Central California District manager, said it might help BLM get grants to manage the area.

Tim Smith said the BLM Bakersfield office has had 60 fires since January compare to 150 for all of 2010.

Kathy Hardy said Peter Ditton is acting California State Director until mid-July.

Resource Management Plan implementation

Johna Hurl, monument manager, said the spring rain caused additional grass to grow, so BLM is using grazing to treat the vegetation as called for in the RMP. The Carrizo received nine inches of rain in December, the usual amount for a year, plus additional rain in the winter and spring.

BLM has prepared an update on grazing in the blunt-nosed leopard lizard core area. Due to limited staffing and other priorities, the report wasn't posted on the web until recently. BLM will work to get future reports posted as they are finalized.

Karen Doran, BLM range conservationist, said the RMP calls for BLM to maintain and enhance viable populations of target species in core areas. In years when there are low populations of target species and vegetation is above optimum levels, BLM will use vegetation management tools including grazing.

The optimum habitat for the lizards is 500-1,000 pounds of biomass per acre from April-September when the lizards are active. Areas being grazed have more than 1,000 pounds per acre and low populations. Some areas with high biomass and high populations are not being grazed.

Mountain plover habitat is being managed based on that species' needs. Fairy shrimp habitat is being grazed at the same rate it has been for the last 10-15 years since management for that species needs to stay constant.

Tim Smith said the grazing plans are discussed with the Managing Partners, The Nature Conservancy and the California Department of Fish and Game.

Projects and Updates

Johna Hurl gave an overview of projects done with American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funding:

Hazardous structures at the Selby Ranch house were demolished and removed and Selby Road was resurfaced.

Five hundred acres of native grassland and shrubland were restored and fences were constructed to help restore unique Alvord oak habitat. Ten thousand plugs of native grasses were planted.

In addition to the ARRA projects, the Carrizo celebrated the 10th anniversary of the National Landscape Conservation Service and the monument. The Carrizo RMP decision was signed at the event.

Volunteers contributed 3,000 hours in a variety of projects from removing fencing to landscaping at the Washburn Ranch. California Conservation Corps crews also were used for fencing work.

About 10,000 visitors came to the Carrizo in 2010, a record number.

A new parking area was constructed at the Visitor Center.

The Supplemental Rules for the RMP have been submitted for publication in the Federal Register.

BLM signed a memorandum of Understanding with the City of Santa Margarita for the city to act as a gateway community to the Carrizo. About 60 people attended a wildflower tour sponsored by the city with more on a mailing list. There also are ongoing activities with the City of Taft, the first gateway community.

BLM has started managing visits to Painted Rock under the permit system developed in coordination with the Native American Advisory Committee. In addition, the road to Painted Rock was resurfaced.

Buildings at the Van Meter Ranch were stabilized and the Traver Ranch has been cleaned up and the main building reroofed.

BLM solicited bids for a contract to record baseline data at Painted Rock.

Research

Kathy Sharum said research projects include a U.S. Geological Survey pronghorn fawn study, a giant kangaroo rat study, a vegetation study and vegetation mapping to help track climate change.

Biologists are studying the Kern primrose sphinx moth, a species found 10 years ago.

Core samples are being taken in the Soda Lake area that should show climate change data over time.

Laura Prude from the University of California is continuing her Carrizo ecosystem study.

Inventories have been conducted for numerous species including the grasshopper sparrow, long-billed curlew, listed species and sensitive species.

BLM helped the Point Reyes Bird Observatory with a LeConte's thrasher study.

Outreach

Carrizo staff participated in a number of forums including the Morro Bay Bird Festival, Taft Peddlers' Fair, Santa Margarita Wildflower Festival and National Landscape Conservation System science symposium, in addition to talking to groups and individual visitors.

Travel Management

Ryan Cooper said a separate travel management plan is being finalized that incorporates the information from the different sections of the RMP.

BLM isn't seeing a lot of new roads appearing. To close existing roads, BLM first puts up a Carsonite post with a closure sign. If that doesn't work BLM constructs a temporary barrier; then a more permanent barrier if the travel continues.

Public Comment

Cal French said he has seen yellow starthistle along Caliente Ridge Road. He also has seen what appears to be sahara mustard, another invasive weed, in the middle of the Carrizo. There needs to be a map with coordinates showing where the private inholdings are on the Carrizo. People crossing the monument find it hard to find the private land boundaries.

Pat Veasart said BLM has done a good job of tracking what the RMP calls for in relation to vegetation management. The Department of Fish and Game is proposing a mitigated negative declaration for grazing on the Chimineas. It includes an American Ranch unit within the monument boundary.

MAC members asked about coordination with DFG. Johna Hurl said BLM has been working with DFG on an interagency basis. She will follow up with DFG on the grazing issue for the Chimineas.

Dennis Fox said medical facilities should be notified by all agencies when controlled burns are planned so they can prepare for an increase of patients with respiratory problems.

Tim Smith said BLM didn't do a prescribed burn on the Carrizo last year. BLM gets air quality permits and issues press releases when doing controlled burns.

Next meeting

Jim Patterson suggested the meeting be held in conjunction with some activity the MAC could view or participate in.

Tim Smith and Johna Hurl will look at the calendar for the next six months and the six months beyond that.

Ray Hatch suggested the gateway communities and Friends of the Carrizo be an agenda topic to discuss how they can get involved and become more effective.

Jim Patterson suggested The Nature Conservancy and California Department of Fish and Game should participate in future MAC meetings.